

"Have Certain News Reports Been Influenced by Reasons Other than Providing Information to the Public?"

*Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy, District of Columbia
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515*

(From the Congressional Record, April 27, 1977)

Mr. Speaker, over the past two days, the "Washington Post" has run two news stories and one editorial about questions I have raised concerning journalists and the manner in which the House assassinations probe has been treated by some in the print media. I wish to clarify certain positions which those news articles have attributed to me so that my colleagues in the Congress may clearly understand where I stand.

The House Assassinations Committee has no plans, current or future, to call news reporters before it for purposes of probing their coverage of the investigation. I have simply stated that I have a personal interest in finding out whether certain news reports have been influenced by reasons other than providing information to the public. My interest stems from my belief that some of the reports have been designed to discourage the probe by the House.

Objectivity in reporting on as sensitive a matter as these assassinations probes is of great importance, in my view. My concerns in this regard were prompted by a published report in the "Washington Star-News" of November 30, 1973, in which it was reported that the CIA employed some 40 journalists who doubled as undercover contacts. On December 1, 1973, the "Washington Post" carried a similar article. I am including for the Record both articles as part of my remarks.

One of the two undercover contacts whom the articles identified is currently assigned to cover, report, and interpret the activities of the committee for the "Washington Star-News". I simply wonder how many of the unnamed former contacts are similarly reporting and interpreting the probe. That is the extent of my interest.

I am a strong supporter and advocate of hard, factual news coverage, and I cherish dearly the right of every American to speak out. I am, however, greatly troubled by the thought that the news media, which has much influence over us, has, at least in the past, been linked to the CIA. My concern is heightened by revelations of domestic activity and abuses by the CIA, revelations which, in part, caused both the House and the Senate to establish select committees to investigate intelligence agencies.

In assessing the initial investigation of the Kennedy assassination the Senate select committee concluded in book V of its final report of the Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities:

"The Committee has, however, developed evidence

which impeaches the process by which the intelligence agencies arrived at their own conclusions about the assassination, and by which they provided information to the Warren Commission. This evidence indicates that . . . the investigation of the assassination was deficient and that facts which might have substantially affected the course of the investigation were not provided the Warren Commission or those individuals within the FBI and the CIA, as well as other agencies of Government, who were charged with investigating the assassination."

Although I have publicly stated my concern, I have not sought, nor have I intended, to intimidate the press. I am hopeful that these remarks will serve to clear the air surrounding this issue. I believe all my colleagues will agree that it is a sad and dangerous commentary on our news delivery system if those charged with informing the public have personal interests at stake.

The news articles follow:

[From the "Washington Star-News", Nov. 30, 1973]

Journalists Doubling as CIA Contacts

(By Oswald Johnston)

The Central Intelligence Agency has some three dozen American journalists working abroad on its payroll as undercover informants, some of them as full-time agents, the "Star-News" has learned.

After CIA director William E. Colby ordered a review of the practice two months ago, agency officials found the names of some 40 full-time reporters, freelance journalists and correspondents for trade publications in their files as regular undercover contacts who supplied information to agents in the field and who are regularly paid for their services.

The use of foreign correspondents by the CIA has been quietly suspected — and feared — for years by legitimate reporters who have worked overseas. But the suspicion has never been verifiable until now. The facts were made known by an authoritative source.

The continuing extent of the practice and its wide scope, which is believed to have been scaled down since the Cold War tensions of the 1950's, was apparently a surprise even to Colby, who last month ordered a significant cutback in the CIA relationship with journalists connected with major news organizations.

No longer to remain on the agency payroll is the one category of journalist-agents whose continued

existence could most seriously compromise the integrity of the American press in general and possibly cripple its ability to function overseas.

To be phased out is a small group of no more than five full-time staff correspondents with general-circulation news organizations who function as undercover contacts for the CIA and are paid for their services on a regular contractual basis.

It is understood that three of these agents have maintained their CIA contacts without the knowledge of the news organizations involved, but that the CIA sideline of the other two is known to their civilian employers.

Sources refused to identify any of the reporters involved, but it is understood that none of the five agents who are being cut off were regular staff correspondents of major American daily newspapers with regular overseas bureaus.

Colby is understood to have ordered the termination of this handful of journalist-agents in the full realization that CIA employment of reporters in a nation which prides itself on an independent press is a subject fraught with controversy.

Nevertheless, he has approved explicitly the continued maintenance of more than 30 other CIA agents abroad who are not strictly newsmen but who rely on some kind of journalistic "cover" for their intelligence operations.

Among those to be maintained is by far the largest category of journalist-agents: a group consisting of about 25 operatives scattered across the globe who appear to the world as free-lance magazine writers, "stringers" for newspapers, news-magazines and news services, and itinerant authors. (A stringer is a journalist, usually self-employed, who offers news-magazines on a piece-work basis to news organizations which do not have regular staff members in the stringer's city.)

Agents in this category are not regularly identified with any single publication, and most of them are full-time informants who frankly use their writing or reporting as cover for their presence in a foreign city. Most of them are American citizens.

Most are paid directly and regularly for services rendered, but a few of these semi-independent free-lance writers occasionally draw on CIA funds to pay out-of-pocket expenses for trips in which the agency had an interest or for entertaining a useful contact.

A second group of overseas correspondents whom Colby intends to keep on the payroll consists of eight writers for small, limited-circulation specialty publications, such as certain types of trade journals or commercial newsletters. It is understood that most in this group operate as paid CIA informants with the approval of their employers.

Colby also intends to keep up the quiet, informal relationship the agency has built up over the years with many reporters working at home and abroad and editors who for their part maintain regular contact with CIA officials in the routine performance of their journalistic duties.

No money changes hands under these relationships, either as occasional payment or as reimbursement for expenses. In general, the relationship is limited to occasional lunches, interviews or telephone conversa-

tions during which information would be exchanged or verified. Each side understands that the other is pursuing only his own tasks.

In such a relationship, the reporter would be free to use the information he gained in a news story, and occasionally the CIA agent might make use of what he has learned from the reporter. Very likely, the CIA official would report the gist of his conversations with the reporter to his superiors, orally or in a written memo.

In this group, sources indicated, the CIA includes "Star-News" reporter Jeremiah O'Leary whose name apparently found its way into agency files as a result of contacts of this professional type during assignment overseas for the "Star-News".

(Star-News editors have discussed this matter with O'Leary and other sources and have found no evidence to suggest that either he or this newspaper has been compromised.)

Veteran intelligence operatives are understood to look with mixed feelings on Colby's decision to break off CIA contacts with legitimate full-time correspondents.

On the one hand, journalists operate under conditions that, in the eyes of a professional spy, provide a natural "cover", combined with unusually good access to people and places abroad that would be unavailable to persons in other professions.

The use of journalist-agents is known to be widespread in Communist-bloc countries where the press is government-controlled, and during the 1930's the Tass correspondent who was also a Soviet agent was almost proverbial.

At the same time, agency officials are known to recognize that CIA penetration of the American press, if discovered or even suspected to exist on a wide scale, would further damage the CIA's shaky public image at home and could seriously compromise the reputation of the American press.

For both of these reasons, sources were extremely reluctant to give any details of the operations in which journalist-agents were involved or to discuss their assignments in any but the most general way. Sources who verified the existence of the practice refused to reveal how much the agents were paid or where they have been deployed.

Colby himself is thought to be solely responsible for the decision to cut off the CIA relationship with full-time staff correspondents for general-news-gathering organizations.

During his Senate confirmation hearings last summer, Colby promised in the aftermath of the Watergate-related disclosures of domestic political espionage that he would take pains to operate "an American intelligence agency" — that is, one with operations compatible with a democratic society.

Colby's cutback on CIA use of the press is understood to have been governed by that promise. Nevertheless, Colby has privately justified past use of the news media as agency cover by stressing that newsmen operatives were not as a rule used as vehicles for planting propaganda.

As a matter of standard operating procedure, sources insist, an agent operating under cover as a

freelance writer or as a staff correspondent for a newspaper or news agency almost never had his news stories or articles "critiqued" by his case officer.

While propaganda admittedly has been an important part of clandestine CIA operations abroad, that function has been kept separate from the routine running of agents, even though both assignments belonged to the agency's Clandestine Services, under the Operations directorate.

Accordingly, the extensive network of dummy foundations through which the CIA was revealed in 1967 to have funneled cash to such publications as "Encounter" magazine or such organizations as the American Newspaper Guild was not related to the use of newsmen or writers as intelligence operatives in the field.

If anything, the use of newsmen in this way seems to have been carried out at the discretion of station chiefs abroad, with little or no central oversight.

Until late last summer, neither Colby himself nor the top officials in the Operations directorate had any precise information on how many clandestine agents were currently operating under journalistic cover.

During September, in the aftermath of revelations that the Nixon administration used journalists as paid political spies during the 1968 and 1972 presidential campaigns, and in response to queries from the press, Colby ordered an in-house investigation within the Clandestine Services to find out exactly what the situation was.

The specific impetus for the press inquiries, which in turn spurred Colby to order the Operations directorate to search its files, was the published disclosure that Seymour K. Friedin, a political spy for the 1972 Nixon campaign, regularly passed information to the CIA when working as a syndicated columnist in Europe during the 1950's.

[From the Washington Post, Dec. 1, 1973]

Use Revealed by Colby Survey - Newsmen Supply Data to CIA

The Central Intelligence Agency has been paying more than three dozen agents operating under journalistic covers abroad for part-time or full-time services. This was determined by CIA Director William E. Colby as the result of a survey of undercover agents spurred by recent congressional inquiries into possible domestic operations of the agency.

Colby has reportedly decided to remove from the CIA payroll a small number of full-time news correspondents with whom the agency had contracted for services, according to authoritative sources. But it is understood that he plans to retain the services of the majority of the journalist agents, who are not associated with major publications but function under various reportorial covers.

The CIA director was reported to be out of town yesterday on official business and agency spokesmen would not comment officially on the report, published in the "Washington Star-News". It was independently confirmed, however, by knowledgeable officials.

Rep. Lucien Nedzi (D-Mich.), chairman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Intelligence, said yesterday he would make inquiries into the practice

of paying journalists for intelligence services.

"I can't say I'm really surprised," Nedzi said of the disclosure. "I suppose the real problem was whether the press was being used to peddle a certain line. To them it was an arrangement for gathering of intelligence. I find it difficult to see much wrong with it."

So far the only two journalists' names that have emerged from the CIA's file belong to a smaller group of perhaps a dozen correspondents with whom the agency has maintained informal, unpaid, working relationships. One is former Europe-based columnist Seymour K. Friedin, who was implicated as a supplier of information to the Nixon campaign in 1972. The other is "Star-News" correspondent Jeremiah O'Leary, as reported in the "Star-News" story. O'Leary was mentioned in a category of newsmen who occasionally exchange information with CIA officials in the routine performance of journalistic duties without any monetary considerations.

Interviews with CIA station chiefs or lesser officials in overseas posts are not uncommon practices for correspondents of most major publications in the performance of their news-gathering functions. Normally, however, it is not considered part of the journalistic function to provide information to government agents.

Several former CIA operatives expressed surprise at the number of newsmen Colby discovered on the agency's current payroll. "It's quite a bit more than I would have expected," said one CIA veteran who now monitors agency activities on Capitol Hill.

The majority of this group, some two dozen, were determined to be operating under the cover of freelance journalists or "stringers" (correspondents not on the regular staffs of publications) working in foreign posts.

In 1967 the agency was wracked by a massive series of disclosures that it was underwriting activities of book publishers, magazines, student and cultural organizations and trade unions, including the American Newspaper Guild.

In the aftermath of those revelations the CIA was understood to have withdrawn from covert financing of such organizations as well as from a network of foundation conduits through which the money was channeled.

More recently agency officials have been questioned by congressional oversight committees — in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal — about CIA involvement in domestic activities. Several bills have been proposed which are designed to curtail domestic operations of the CIA.

There have, however, been no recent revelations of CIA penetration of domestic institutions comparable to the scale of those uncovered in the late 1960's. □

[End of Congressman Fauntroy's Insertion
in the Congressional Record]